

Message Text

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EB-08 FRB-03 INR-10 SP-02 STR-07 TRSE-00 LAB-04
SIL-01 OMB-01 PM-05 H-01 L-03 PA-01 SS-15 /093 W
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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2269
INFO USICA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USMISSION USNATO
AMCONSUL ADANA
AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
AMCONSUL IZMIR
USDOCOLANDSOUTHEAST
CINCUSAFE
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ANKARA 4388

USEEC

USICA FOR VOA/PN, PGM/RC, PGM/PPE, EU

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, TU, US
SUBJ: DOMESTIC POLITICAL EFFECTS OF TURKISH PRIMIN ECEVIT'S
US VISIT

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REF: ANKARA 4246

1. SUMMARY: ECEVIT'S MAY 29-JUNE 5 VISIT TO THE US SEEMS
INITIALLY TO HAVE BOOSTED HIS POSITION AMONG PRO-WESTERN VOTERS
WHILE IRRITATING LEFTIST ELEMENTS IN HIS OWN PARTY. VISIT
APPEARS AS GAMBLE FOR HIGH DOMESTIC POLITICAL STAKES; OUTCOME
OF GAMBLE WILL NOT BE CLEAR UNTIL CONGRESS VOTES ON EMBARGO;

REPEAL WOULD BRING BIG GAIN FOR ECEVIT, WHILE NON-REPEAL WOULD MEAN A FAILURE AND AN AFFRONT, AND WOULD REQUIRE THAT HE TAKE STRONG RETALIATORY MEASURES FOR POLITICAL SELF-DEFENSE. MEANWHILE, DESPITE GAINS IN CENTER, DISCONTENT OF PARTY'S LEFT PROBABLY REMAINS A SOURCE OF INSTABILITY FOR ECEVIT'S GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. IN DOMESTIC POLITICAL TERMS, PRIMIN ECEVIT'S VISIT TO THE U.S. MAY 29-JUNE 5 SEEMS IN SEVERAL WAYS A MAJOR GAMBLE WHICH IS BEGINNING TO PAY OFF BUT COULD YET GO BADLY. THE VISIT DID MUCH TO MODIFY ECEVIT'S "FUZZY LEFTIST" DOMESTIC IMAGE: IT EMPHASIZED ECEVIT'S PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION WITH THE EFFORT TO LIFT THE EMBARGO VIA A POLICY CONSIDERED HERE TO BE CONCILIATORY, AND IT PORTRAYED HIM AS BASICALLY PRO-NATO AND INTERESTED IN PRESERVING CLOSE (IF ALTERED) TIES WITH THE U.S. IN TAKING THIS PUBLIC STAND, ECEVIT--APART FROM FOREIGN POLICY GOALS--PROBABLY WAS GAMBLING FOR SEVERAL DOMESTIC POLITICAL OBJECTIVES: (A) TO WIDEN HIS COMPETITIVE GAP OVER HIS ARCH-RIVAL, JUSTICE PARTY CHAIRMAN DEMIREL, BY SHOWING THAT HE COULD DO WHAT DEMIREL COULD NOT AS PRIMIN; (B) TO WIN THE CONFIDENCE AND SUPPORT OF THOSE WHO WANT TURKEY TO STAY WITH THE WEST, WHILE GIVING THE LIE TO OPPOSITION CHARGES THAT HE IS A "COMMUNIST"; (C) TO STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION FOR DEALING WITH OTHER MAJOR PROBLEMS; AND (D) TO CONTAIN AT THE SAME TIME THE OPPOSITION OF ANTI-U.S. LEFTIST ELEMENTS IN HIS OWN PARTY.

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3. UNTIL CONGRESS MAKES ITS DECISION TO REPEAL OR MAINTAIN THE EMBARGO, THE RESULTS OF ECEVIT'S GAMBLE WILL NOT BE FINAL. FOR THE TIME BEING, HOWEVER, ECEVIT SEEMS TO BE WINNING. FOR A WEEK HE DOMINATED THE DOMESTIC NEWS MEDIA, NOT AS A PARTISAN FIGURE BUT AS TURKEY'S CHAMPION. PICTURES SHOWED HIM PRESIDING OVER A GROUP OF OTHER NATO STATESMEN; HEADLINES DETAILED HIS MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENT CARTER AND OTHER LEADERS, HIS VIGOROUS PRESENTATION OF THE TURKISH POSITION IN SPEECHES, HIS ADROIT HANDLING OF PRESS QUESTIONS, AND THE VERY HARD PACE HE MAINTAINED. EVEN NORMALLY CRITICAL COLUMNISTS PRAISED HIS PERFORMANCE.

4. ECEVIT'S INITIAL POLITICAL GAINS FROM HIS VISIT, IN TERMS OF COMPETING WITH DEMIREL AND BROADENING POPULAR SUPPORT AND CONFIDENCE, SEEM ATTESTED TO BY BOTH PRIVATE COMMENTS OF OPPOSITION POLITICIANS AND THE OPPOSITION'S PUBLIC ATTEMPTS TO TAKE SOME OF THE SHINE OFF HIS IMAGE. ASIDE FROM THE EARLY CHARGE BY JUSTICE PARTY (JP) LEADER DEMIREL THAT ECEVIT HAD "FLED" THE COUNTRY AND ITS SERIOUS INTERNAL PROBLEMS, JP AND NATIONALIST ACTION PARTY (NAP) PUBLIC CRITICISM HAS MAINLY CENTERED ON THE ARGUMENT THAT ECEVIT HAD NO RIGHT TO UNDERTAKE

SUCH IMPORTANT MISSIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING WITH "THE NATION," I.E., THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, INCLUDING THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. IN A JUNE 7 ADDRESS, DEMIREL CRITICIZED ECEVIT FOR HIS CONDUCT DURING HIS US VISIT, WHICH HE SAID APPEARED TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT TURKEY'S DEGREE OF ATTACHMENT TO THE WESTERN ALLIANCE DEPENDED ON ECEVIT'S PRIVATE WHIMS, AND FOR TRYING TO REAP PERSONAL POLITICAL BENEFITS FROM HIS TOUR.

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5. IN JUNE 7 COMMENTS TO EMBOFF, NAP SEC GEN GULTEKIN AGREED THAT US VISIT HAD BEEN A COUP FOR ECEVIT, BUT ADDED THAT THE EMBARGO ISSUE HAD BECOME A NO-LOSE PROPOSITION FOR ECEVIT. IF THE US ARMS EMBARGO IS LIFTED, ECEVIT AND

SUPPORTERS WILL CLAIM THAT THIS IS DUE TO ECEVIT'S STATES-
MANSHIP AND SKILL IN HANDLING THE US; IF THE EMBARGO IS NOT
LIFTED, THERE WILL BE AN ANTI-US REACTION WHICH WILL BENEFIT
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THE LEFT, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, THE "LEFT'S LEADER," ECEVIT.

6. WHILE PART TWO OF GULTEKIN'S INTERPRETATION IS PARTISAN
AND DEBATABLE, IT DOES SEEM FAIRLY ACCEPTED IN BOTH PRO-
AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT CIRCLES THAT THE LIFTING OF THE EMBARGO
WILL STRONGLY REDOUND TO ECEVIT'S CREDIT WITH PRO-WESTERN
VOTERS. THAT CREDIT, TOGETHER WITH THE GROWING PUBLIC PORTRAYAL
OF THE ADMINISTRATION AS SYMPATHETIC TO TURKEY'S PROBLEMS
AND DEDICATED TO THE LIFTING OF THE EMBARGO, COULD HELP
SET THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL STAGE FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO SPEED
UP THE PROCESS OF REPAIRING AND REBUILDING US-TURKISH DEFENSE
RELATIONS AS SOON AS THE EMBARGO IS LIFTED. HOWEVER, ECEVIT'S
IDENTIFICATION WITH THE EMBARGO ISSUE REMAINS A GAMBLE.
IN THE WORST CASE, A CONGRESSIONAL DECISION TO CONTINUE THE
EMBARGO WOULD BE SEEN AS A PERSONAL FAILURE BY ECEVIT OR
AN AFFRONT TO HIM, THUS RAISING THE POLITICAL PRESSURE ON
HIM TO TAKE STRONG MEASURES TO "DEFEND THE NATIONAL HONOR"
IN THE FACE OF PERCEIVED US HOSTILITY. OPPOSITION PARTIES
WOULD UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES FIND IT POLITICALLY DIFFICULT
TO OPPOSE REACTIVE MEASURES, ALTHOUGH THEY COULD STRONGLY
CRITICIZE ECEVIT'S FAILURE TO GET THE EMBARGO LIFTED.
POTENTIAL CONGRESSIONAL COMPROMISES IN THE RANGE BETWEEN
REPEAL AND CONTINUATION COULD POSE TRICKIER PROBLEMS FOR
ECEVIT, SINCE POTENTIAL SUPPORT FOR A GIVEN RESPONSE MIGHT
NOT BE SO CALCULABLE AS IN THE "WORST CASE".

7. AS FOR THE GAMBLE THAT A VISIBLY PRO-NATO ECEVIT CAN
SIMULTANEOUSLY CONTAIN THE REACTIONS OF HIS OWN PARTY'S
LEFT, THE OUTCOME SEEMS STILL IN DOUBT. ALTHOUGH MEMBERS
OF THIS FACTION ARE CONSTRAINED FROM COMPLAINING IN PUBLIC,
A DISSIDENT RPP PARLIAMENTARIAN TOLD US THAT MANY RPP LEFTISTS
WERE DISGUSTED TO SEE THEIR PARTY'S LEADER HOBNOBBING WITH U.S.
LEADERS AND MAKING PRO-NATO STATEMENTS. THE DISSIDENT SAID THAT
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RPP LEFTISTS WOULD CONFRONT ECEVIT WITH THEIR CRITICISMS IN
PARTY MEETINGS AFTER HIS RETURN. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR JUST HOW
SERIOUS THEIR DISSATISFACTION MAY BE OR HOW IT RANKS IN COMPARISON
WITH OTHER INTERNAL PARTY GRIEVANCES AGAINST ECEVIT (FOR EXAMPLE,
HIS MAKING THE GOVERNMENT A "ONE-MAN SHOW"). ECEVIT MAY BE
ABLE TO IGNORE IT, AIDED BY THE WIDESPREAD BELIEF IN HIS

"IRREPLACEABILITY" AND STRENGTHENED BY HIS INCREASED POPULARITY OUTSIDE THE LEFT. IF HE DOES ENCOUNTER A REALLY SERIOUS REACTION FROM THE LEFT, THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE FEW BONES HE COULD THROW THEM ASIDE FROM THE NORMAL BENEFITS OF BEING IN A GOVERNING PARTY. HIS RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS FAVORING LEGALIZATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY MAY HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO HELP RECONCILE THE LEFT. ALSO, ECEVIT'S TRIP TO MOSCOW LATER THIS MONTH MIGHT HELP A LITTLE TO BALANCE THE U.S. TRIP IN LEFTIST EYES. HOWEVER, A PARTICULARLY WARM VISIT WITH THE SOVIETS COULD THREATEN TO UPSET EFFORTS IN CONGRESS TO LIFT THE EMBARGO, WHICH IN TURN WOULD GIVE THE OPPOSITION AN OBVIOUS MEANS TO BLAME HIM FOR THE EMBARGO'S CONTINUATION.

8. MEANWHILE, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT WHATEVER GAINS ECEVIT MAY MAKE IN THE CENTER, DISSATISFACTION WITHIN THE LEFT WING OF THE RPP, WHICH PREDATES ECEVIT'S US TRIP, WILL CONTINUE TO FESTER. JUST AS THE MAIN WEAKNESS, AND ULTIMATE NEMESIS, OF THE CONSERVATIVE COALITION WHICH PRECEDED ECEVIT'S WAS FACTIONALISM WITHIN ITS MAJOR PARTY (THE JP), SO THE MAIN DANGER TO ECEVIT'S GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO BE WITHIN HIS PARTY. WE EXPECT THAT THE RPP LEFT WILL NOT CHOOSE TO PROVOKE A CRISIS AT THIS TIME, BUT ITS DISCONTENT AND THE POTENTIAL IT HAS TO DISRUPT THE GOVERNMENT IS LIKELY TO REMAIN A SOURCE OF CONCERN TO ECEVIT, AND IT WILL NECESSARILY BE A FACTOR WHICH WILL MOLD ECEVIT'S REACTION TO A FAILURE TO LIFT THE EMBARGO.

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